

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 4:4 - PART 3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Now the third area in which we're to trust G-d, having to do with friends, family, coworkers, and others. There'll prove to be two areas in which our trust in G-d's decisions for us will come into play when it comes to that realm: when we find ourselves alone, or when we're with others.

Let's start off by concentrating on family life. If you're away from your family or without one and you're lonely, then know that you're freer then to grow close to G-d than you'd be if you weren't alone. In fact, you could look upon G-d as your confidante then, if you will. (Indeed, many great souls have sought out solitude, since it allows for the sort of exclusive intimacy with G-d they so desire.)

You'd also do well to realize that you'd need to concentrate far less on earning money if you're alone, and could use that time and energy for your devotions instead. For as an ascetic who separated himself from his family regularly once pointed out when asked why he did that, it was because he "noticed how heart-distracted" he was when family was all around, and "how easy it was to concentrate on otherworldly matters" when he was alone.

Realize as well that your situation in that instance is very much like your own soul's in this world. For it, too, is alone and lonely in this world, being a wayfarer here for all intents and purposes, and just "passing through". Take that to heart and allow it to nourish and gladden your soul. If that doesn't assuage your loneliness, though, then realize that everyone is alone at one point or another, and that we'll each be on our own when we leave this world.

On the other hand, trusting in G-d's decisions for your life if you **do** have a family entails your accepting them with love by engaging with each one in a heartfelt way and being a good example, but being sure to set aside time for your devotions as well.

In fact, your relations to your family **are** a part of your spiritual devotions. Where better to learn how to love another Jew than in your own Jewish home? And where better to teach the greatness of G-d's Torah than where you're loved and seen day after day? In fact, by doing that you'll enjoy life in the here-and-now as well as eternal life, in that you'd be enjoying the fruits of love, growing in your being, and achieving spiritual excellence!

Now, you'd be able to express your trust in G-d in various ways when it comes to relations with yet other people. But we'd need a short introduction to what's behind what we're being taught here.

The great principle underlying trusting in G-d's decisions in that realm -- as well as all of reality as

we know it! -- is that G-d is behind absolutely everything that goes on. In fact, what separates full and hearty believers from weaker ones is belief in just that. That's not to deny the role of everything else in the universe or our own roles. It's just meant to underscore the mostly quiet, invisible, but utterly dominant presence of G-d in this world.

Knowing that, then, it would do us well to realize that the decision as to whether something or another will come our way is in G-d's hands alone. But as the expression goes, "G-d has many messengers". So while His will is implemented by various means indeed, people in close proximity to us are most likely to be His agents.

So, if you ever need something and someone implements your getting it, know that it was G-d who agreed to your having it -- and that the other individual was merely His agent. Do that and you'll be like "a farmer who tills the ground and plants seeds for a living" as Ibn Pakudah puts it, "who knows that the seeds will grow, produce fruit and increase *only if G-d decides it should*". And rather than "thank the soil for its part in it all", he thanks G-d.

As such, whenever you ask someone for a favor, trust that *G-d Himself* decides whether or not it's to be granted. If it's indeed granted, then thank G-d -- but thank the person involved for his part, too. If the other person decides not to do you the favor, though, don't accuse him of withholding something from you. Understand that G-d had decided that it wasn't to come your way.

If someone asks *you* for a favor, try to accommodate him if you can, but know too that it's G-d who must fulfill the request in the end. If you manage to do your friend the favor, then acknowledge G-d's part in it. But if you don't manage to fulfill it for one good reason or another, then don't blame yourself (after all, it was G-d who willed that to be so). Let your friend know you did everything you could, but that you simply weren't successful.

And finally -- and this is admittedly very difficult, but so, so vital a lesson in trusting G-d -- if anyone does you harm, then trust G-d's judgment in this instance as well, and see the other person's deeds in that light. The righteous would speculate on how their own past wrongful deeds might have brought that on, and they'd repent.

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